



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Togo

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 21,925 square miles, and its population is estimated officially at 5,090,000. The most recent available statistics, published by the Demographic Research Unit of the University of Lome in 2004, state that the population is approximately 33 percent traditional animist, 27.8 percent Catholic, 13.7 percent Sunni Muslim, and 9.5 percent Protestant. The remaining 16 percent of the population consists of various Christian (9.8 percent) and non-Christian groups (1.2 percent), and persons not affiliated with any religious group (4.9 percent). Many converts to the more widespread faiths continue to perform rituals that originated in traditional indigenous religions. The number of atheists in the country is unknown but is estimated to be small.

Most Muslims live in the central and northern regions of the country. Catholics, Protestants, and other Christians live mostly in the southern regions.

Missionaries are active in the country and represent Assembly of God, Baptist, Catholic, Protestant, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon), and Muslim groups.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. For instance, the Government voted in favor of the 2004 U.N. General Assembly Resolution on the Elimination of All Forms of Religious Intolerance, which reaffirmed that freedom of religion is an inherent human right. There is no state religion.

The Government recognizes seven Christian and two Muslim holy days as national holidays, including New Year, Easter Monday, Ascension, Pentecost Monday, Assumption, All Saints' Day, Christmas, Tabaski, and Eid al-Fitr (Ramadan).

The Government has registration requirements for recognition of religious organizations. Officially recognized religious groups that conduct humanitarian and development projects receive tax benefits on imports but must request such benefits through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Applications for registration must be submitted to the Ministry of Interior's Division of Civil Security. A religious organization must submit its statutes, a statement of doctrine, bylaws, the names and addresses of executive board members, the pastor's diploma, a contract, a site map, and a description of its financial situation. The criteria for recognition are the authenticity of the pastor's diploma and, most importantly, the ethical behavior of the group, which must not cause a breach of public order.

The Government did not reject the application of any religious group but asked some organizations to resubmit their applications when their files were incomplete. At times, if an application provided insufficient information, the application remained open indefinitely. Members of groups that were not officially recognized could practice their religion but did not have legal standing.

The Civil Security Division also has enforcement responsibilities when there are problems or complaints associated with a religious organization. For example, the Civil Security Division handles noise complaints made against religious organizations, particularly noise complaints related to religious celebrations at night. The Ministry of Interior sends security forces to address the complaints.

The Government recognizes 111 religious groups, most of which are small Protestant groups and some new Muslim groups. The Ministry of Interior issues a receipt that serves as temporary recognition to applicant religious groups and associations and allows them to practice their religion, pending investigations and issuance of written authorization, which usually takes several years.

The Muslim Union of Togo reported that since 1991, 52 Islamic groups had registered with the Ministry of Interior and the Muslim Union of Togo, including Islamic development nongovernmental organizations and Islamic radio and television enterprises.

Foreign missionary groups are subject to the same registration requirements as other groups.

Religion classes are not part of the curriculum at public schools. Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic schools are common; however, they do not receive funding from the Government.

There are at least seven radio stations affiliated with religious groups. Several radio stations were shut down following the April 24 presidential election, including Radio Maria, a Catholic radio station. The Government prevented Radio Maria from broadcasting for 1 month beginning April 25 because it erroneously reported the institution of a citywide curfew in Lome.

The Government had previously taken issue with a particular program broadcast by the same radio station. The government-controlled media regulatory body, High Authority for Radio-Television and Communication, or HAAC (l'Haute Autorite de l'Audio-Visuel et de la Communication) sent a formal request to Radio Maria to discontinue its program "The Years 2000 In Your Country" (Les Annes 2000 Chez Vous) in October 2004. This program consisted of a live political debate in which members of all political parties could participate and listeners could call in. The content of the broadcast was often critical of the Government. After some negotiating, the HAAC eventually required Radio Maria to take this program off the air, asserting that it was not authorized to broadcast shows with political content. The HAAC has not permitted Radio Maria to broadcast this program since October 2004 despite several appeals from the station. However, the law does not limit religious-affiliated stations to programming of an exclusively religious nature.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Constitution prohibits the establishment of political parties based on religion and states explicitly that "no political party should identify itself with a region, an ethnic group, or a religion." There are no other laws or statutes that specifically restrict religious freedoms. Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims occupy positions of authority in the local and national governments.

Religious organizations must request permission to conduct large nighttime celebrations, particularly those involving loud ceremonies in residential areas or that block off city streets. The requests were granted routinely during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Members of different faiths regularly invited one another to their respective ceremonies. Inter marriage between persons of different religions was common.

The Christian Council addressed common issues among Protestant denominations. The Council comprises the Assemblies of

God, Protestant Methodist, the Baptist Convention, Pentecostal churches, Seventh-day Adventist, Lutheran, and Evangelical Presbyterian denominations. The council continued to debate whether to expand its membership to include other Protestant organizations. Catholics and Protestants frequently collaborated through the Biblical Alliance.

Unlike his predecessor, the current Roman Catholic Archbishop of Lome continued to refrain from delivering political sermons in praise of President Eyadema.

Since 2002, the Catholic Church Bishops' Conference has spoken on the need for credible, transparent elections, and it has criticized the Government for amending the Constitution and electoral code and manipulating the National Election Commission. On April 17, just before the presidential election, the interim president met with several religious leaders. Among them was the Archbishop of Lome, who, in a press conference after the meeting, said he and his colleagues had urged the Government to ensure a fair and transparent electoral process.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy organized activities to inform the public about religious freedom in the United States that featured discussions of religious diversity and tolerance in the United States. The Embassy also hosted a dinner for Muslim leaders and distributed thousands of publications on U.S. society that included key portions on religious freedom.

The Embassy included religious leaders in the International Visitor's Program and initiated an English language study scholarship program for underprivileged students, whose main beneficiaries were students of the Muslim faith. The 2-year English language program contained regular segments on aspects of life in the United States, including religious tolerance.

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